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ABSTRACT

Involvement of pre-student teachers in a field-based teaching experience organized by the University of Texas at Arlington produced personal and professional growth in the affective domain in over half of the participants. Those education majors who elected to join the program were required to assume the role of teacher aides in a public school classroom each week. Duties included serving on lunchroom duty, organizing and supervising physical education activities, remedial tutoring, laboratory work, and some classroom lesson planning and presentation. A post-assessment revealed attitudinal changes involving interest in the profession, acceptance of pupil differences and learning styles, and sensitivity to the needs and feelings of each pupil. (MB)

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The experimental field-based program was designed to place prestudent teachers in naturalistic school environments prior to the student teaching semester. It was believed that observation and participation in public school classrooms on a regular, structured basis would better prepare student teachers for teaching.

Major objectives for students enrolled in the field-based methods courses were:

1. The student will examine the roles and responsibilities of the teacher both within and beyond the classroom.
2. The student will be able to formulate a broad, differentiated concept of teaching.
3. The student will examine the aspects of the school program that provide for the special needs and interests of children and youth.
4. The student will gain a knowledge of terms, methods and procedures relating to the teaching-learning process.
5. The student will be able to determine whether or not teaching is appropriate as his/her career choice.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the preservice teacher was asked to assume the role of a teacher aide in a public school classroom on a regularly scheduled basis each week. In this capacity the methods student had a variety of responsibilities.

Many of the preservice teachers were asked to serve on lunch-

room duty in the cafeteria or on school grounds. Others were asked to organize and supervise physical education activities or assist a teacher on bus duty.

In other professional roles, the novice educators tutored students who had been absent for several days and were behind in their assignments. They also worked with one or two students on a project or lab exercise that required close supervision. Some were even given the opportunity to plan and present in class an activity for the entire period. Education methods students with special talents, such as dance, were often given the opportunity to work with groups of students in the schools and share their talents.

In addition to the responsibilities in the public schools as aides, the methods students attended classroom sessions conducted by university staff and selected teachers within the school building or district. These class sessions were used to present and discuss teaching units, instructional objectives, effective classroom management, teaching strategies, and other topics common to methods courses.

To provide more effective field-based teaching experiences and plan for program development, an assessment of attitudes of prestudent teachers who participated in the program was necessary. The information was gathered from an especially designed questionnaire and the sample included eighty-five students who participated in the field-based pre-student teaching program. The responses to the survey instrument were tabulated and expressed as percentages. Major attitudinal trends of the prestudent teachers were identified and summarized as follows.

Changes in the preservice teachers were internal, namely

attitudinal. For example, seventy-five percent of those surveyed indicated the teacher aide experience gave them a greater degree of sensitivity toward the classroom pupil's needs, interests, feelings, ideas, and individual learning styles. More than half of the field-based students indicated the practicum gave them a greater interest in the profession. For seventy-three percent of the respondents the accepting of pupil differences and dealing with each pupil in a unique way increased or greatly increased as a result of the field-based program.

Individual responses from these secondary methods students indicated that the experience was a stepping stone from the cold and impersonal college classroom to the invigorating public schools with their real pupils, real teachers, real materials, and real problems. A number of students indicated that there could be no substitute for the experience of working with students prior to student teaching.

Many of the teacher aides found master teachers they admired and wanted to emulate; others were surprised at the pupils' enthusiasm for learning; and many found involvement an important motivational tool. Based on the responses to the survey, there was personal and professional growth in the affective domain in over half of the participants.

In summary, the positive aspects of the prestudent teaching experience deserve emphasis. A major merit of the preservice experience was the mutual benefit derived by the public schools who found additional help to actualize many programs while the college students gained first-hand knowledge of child growth and development in the public school environment. In a transitional phase, the Education Department of the University of Texas at Arlington has formulated a field-

based program for teacher education and has encouraged preservice teachers to take a responsibility for their professional training. Perhaps most importantly, neither the university students nor the public schools were exactly the same as a result of this project; the university students were confident about their career choice and their ability to work with children and youth and the public schools were a little closer to achieving their ultimate goal of helping children develop their individual potential.